

12 W. H. Quilliam, Marmaduke Pickthall and the window of British modernist Islam

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Only very recently, it seems, has scholarship caught up with the fact that historically Britain has had its own native converts to Islam (Ansari, 2004; Gilliat-Ray, 2010, chap. 1; Gilham, 2013). At the height of empire several flourishing Muslim communities existed in England in which these converts were, in one case the mainstay, and in another a prominent leader. Abdullah W H Quilliam and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall both played significant roles in the British Muslim scene of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Quilliam, appointed Shaykh-ul Islam for the Muslims of Britain by Ottoman Sultan ‘Abdul Hamid, led the Liverpool Muslim community, which over a period of two decades produced several hundred native converts. Between the late 1880s and the 1930s, first Quilliam and later Pickthall professed a modernist form of Islam with links to Turkey and India, which they made in some ways British. According to Ron Geaves, in Liverpool Quilliam presided over ‘an [Islamic] system compatible with the lifestyle of Europeans’ (Geaves, 2010, p. 126; see also Gilham, epilogue, 2013). Pickthall, the first Muslim Englishman to translate that Qur’an from Arabic into English, as well as an eloquent publicist for Islam in both Britain and India, after the Great War briefly deputised as the Imam of the Woking mosque, which had among its congregation a substantial number of British converts.

In this essay I intend to evaluate the concept ‘British modernist Islam’ and discuss how this was related to the modernist or liberal trend in the wider Muslim world. I shall also consider the extent to which it was shaped by religious debates of the late colonial period out of which it grew and developed, and how its location within a specific space and time may mean it is unlikely to be repeated. The period under review is bounded at the beginning by W H Quilliam’s public declaration of Islam in 1887 (Gilham, 2013, chap. 2) and at its close by the death of Marmaduke Pickthall in 1936 (Quilliam died in 1932). A key event mid-way would be the foundation, in 1914, of the British Muslim Society by Lord Headley. Both the Liverpool, London and Woking Muslim communities contained a mix of native converts and immigrants/visitors, mainly from the Indian subcontinent. In Liverpool educated middle-class British converts rubbed shoulders with Indian seamen (Geaves, 2010, chap. 3), whilst in Woking western-oriented, anglicised Indian professionals performed

1 *salat* with mainly upper class English converts, presided over by Lord Headley
 2 (Ansari, 2004, p. 130). Quilliam and Pickthall's biographers (Geaves, 2010;
 3 Clark, 1986; Gilham, 2013) present in detail the set of conditions that led to
 4 their subjects' transformation into British Muslims from, respectively, a wealthy
 5 Dissenter and successful lawyer with a strong social conscience; and a traveller,
 6 novelist and journalist who was the son and grandson of Anglican clergymen.
 7 Further, Humayun Ansari has demonstrated how modernist Islam in Britain
 8 was inflected by the background and assumptions of its upper-class converts
 9 and an implied target audience. Evidence for this is to be found in the connec-
 10 tion between Quilliam and Ottoman and other Muslim foreign dignitaries
 11 visiting Liverpool in the late nineties and early 1900s, and later in Woking
 12 in his and Pickthall's interaction with highly educated Muslims from the Indian
 13 subcontinent such as Abdullah Yusuf Ali, producer of another English version
 14 of the Qur'an, and 'a member of that group of Indian Muslims from profes-
 15 sional families concerned with rank and status who aspired to influence under
 16 the British' (Ansari, 2004, p. 102).

17 These high caste cross-cultural connections during the later colonial period
 18 were partly cemented by loyalty to the British empire and a shared Muslim
 19 politics that could on occasions militate against the former. Earliest of the
 20 high profile British converts to Islam, W H Quilliam was a passionate sup-
 21 porter of Ottoman Turkey. He consistently attacked Christian meddling in the
 22 Balkans, and in 1905 addressed a fatwa to British Muslims condemning the
 23 British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary for sending British ships to
 24 participate in naval manoeuvres against Turkey (Geaves, 2010, pp. 103–4).
 25 Before he converted to Islam in 1917, Marmaduke Pickthall wrote a succe-
 26 sion of strongly pro-Turkish articles in the *New Age* periodical (Nash, 2005,
 27 chap. 6). Although they divided over which regime they preferred in Istanbul –
 28 in this matter Pickthall was decidedly more modernist in supporting the Young
 29 Turks – both he and Quilliam were united in finding themselves split by 'loy-
 30 alty to the nation of [their] birth, and the intense feelings for the religion [they]
 31 had adopted by conviction' (Geaves, 2010, p. 166). Though Muslim modernists,
 32 both Englishmen were connected to a much broader spectrum of Muslims
 33 who refused to accept the emasculation (and as it proved eventual dissolution
 34 after the First World War) of the Ottoman domain, the world's last Islamic
 35 empire and largest Muslim power. The build up to the war, which saw Britain
 36 and Turkey ranged on opposite sides, dismayed them as it did otherwise loyal
 37 Indian Muslims. Khwaja Kamaluddin, for example, wrote in the debut issue of
 38 the monthly periodical *Islamic Review and Muslim India* (hereafter *IRMI*) in
 39 February 1913: 'The British Nation should know that the problem in the Near
 40 East is not an exclusive Ottoman question, as shown by a portion of the Press
 41 here, but a vital question of universal Muslim interest' (Kamaluddin, 1913,
 42 p. 15). Ansari confirms: 'It was emotionally impossible for such Muslims to
 43 oppose the Ottoman Caliphate, the most important symbol of the worldwide
 44 Muslim community' (Ansari, 2004, p. 127).

Quilliam, Pickthall, and British modernist Islam

Quilliam and Pickthall became Muslims at precisely the period in which modernist Islam flourished in the wider Muslim world; the time of their deaths in the 1930s coincided with the waning of that influence.¹ In a broad context, any discussion of modernist Islam cannot avoid making reference to the Islamic reformers Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Namik Kamal, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh (Hourani [1962] 1983; Rahman, 1984). 'All these men, who were contemporaries, enthusiastically preached the cultivation of science and the appropriation of the scientific spirit of the West ... their arguments are amazingly similar' (Rahman, 1984, p. 50). The energies of al-Afghani and 'Abduh were directed towards revival of the *umma*, by its very nature a task applied to existing Muslim societies in the East. As a founder member of the Young Ottomans, Namik Kamal was a major influence on Turkish modernist Islam. Quilliam and Pickthall both looked to specific Muslim countries, Turkey and to a lesser extent India, as formative and influential for their Muslim beliefs; and they were tied to the *umma* both as a congregation of nations that sent Muslims to Britain and as countries to where they themselves travelled and for periods settled, in addition to recognising the *umma* as a universalising concept.² Their period of Muslim activity also coincides with the moment of liberal, progressive Islam in India (between the 1870s and the late 1920s) presided over by Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Sayyid Amir Ali and latterly, Muhammad Iqbal.³ However, in the first instant Quilliam and Pickthall projected their *daw'ah* activities to a largely British or European audience.

The conditions that made Islamic modernism possible have been widely discussed although hardly at all in the context of British Muslim converts of the period in question. 'The nineteenth century was also the great age of the battle of ideas in the West, ideas and battles whose strong injection into Muslim society found a ready response. The characteristic of this movement [Islamic modernism] was then primarily intellectual and spiritual' (Rahman 1970, p. 317). Hitherto Islam's connection to modernity and modernism (as opposed to revivalist tendencies within the Islamic world) has overwhelmingly been studied as a reaction to the impact and challenge of western power and ideas (see Moaddel, 2001).⁴ On the other hand, the tiny numbers of westerners who were not put off embracing Islam by the putative, irredeemable backwardness of the Muslim world, as proclaimed by western Orientalist and colonial discourse, did so in the teeth of that very modernity the West was in the process of delivering to the rest of humanity. In an extraordinary act of reversal Quilliam and Pickthall were able to de-link modernity from the West and join it instead to an Islam reformed of stagnant traditionalism and based on reason. For them, as I shall attempt to demonstrate from their writings, Islam was more than an unchanging spiritual code, or a revelation that had been perfected in seventh-century Arabia that they adopted irrespective of modernity. Neither was it a pre-modern religion on to which a modern veneer

1 had been artificially grafted. In conformity to Islamic modernism they con-
 2 strued Islam as rational, common sense-based and proffering the solution to
 3 the problems of the modern world, because it was God's final revelation and
 4 had the malleability to be re-formed so as to answer to the needs of modern
 5 mankind.

6 Geaves states that Quilliam was 'a traditionalist belonging to the Hanafi
 7 school, although he was influenced by the modernist thinking of the Egyptian
 8 Muhammad 'Abduh and the Indian Sayyid Ahmad Khan' (Geaves, 2010,
 9 p. 16).⁵ Quilliam's modernist view of Islam might also be considered as partly
 10 his own ideas worked out in the context of late Victorian doubt, scientism and
 11 esotericism (Geaves, 2010, pp. 38–41).⁶ A thread running throughout his
 12 pamphlet *The Faith of Islam*, published first in 1889, is the polemic that Islam
 13 is a modern faith of sense and reason in contrast to a Christianity benighted
 14 by irrational dogmas and incomprehensible mysteries. For example, reason is
 15 invoked to disapprove the doctrine of the Trinity – 'there is no mystery about
 16 it at all, except to wonder that anyone should be such an arrant stupid as to
 17 believe it ... [In the Qur'an] we will find a logical explanation of the true
 18 nature of Jesus' (Quilliam, 1892, pp. 32–3). 'This illogical fancy of Chris-
 19 tians ... this unexplainable anachronism' kept people from 'understanding of
 20 the actual nature of the true God', whereas in his teaching Muhammad
 21 'relied entirely upon common sense, reason and eloquence, and supported by
 22 the innate conviction of the inspiration of the Almighty he continued his
 23 work' (p. 35, p. 42). As opposed to 'the vicarious sacrifice' and 'the mass of
 24 mystery and superstition taught by Christians under the names of "Redemp-
 25 tion and Regeneration"' the Qur'an offered 'the common sense doctrine that
 26 each soul must account for itself to the Deity' (p. 63).

27 Quilliam's elevation of a modern, rational Islam above backward nine-
 28 teenth-century Christianity is also a regular feature in *IRMI*, which was
 29 launched by members of the Woking Mission in February 1913. Marmaduke
 30 Pickthall, who was also a contributor, followed much the same tack.⁷ Peter
 31 Clark, however, has placed emphasis on 'a common kernel of belief' carrying
 32 over from Pickthall's native Christianity to his faith as a Muslim – acceptance
 33 of the truth of 'the Eternal Unity of God' (Clark, 1986, p. 45; the expression
 34 itself is used by Pickthall in one of his Friday sermons at the Woking
 35 mosque). Indicative of the religious tolerance he inscribed into many of his
 36 writings, Pickthall emphasised that Islam's meaning, submission to God,
 37 could be applied to a practice and attitude of mind that a unitarian Christian
 38 or Jew who rejected priesthood might also be said to follow. Islam's advance
 39 on Christianity was its prescription of 'a body of obligations on matters of
 40 social and personal behaviour' (Clark, 1986, p. 47). Again, like Quilliam (and
 41 Ahmad Khan before him) as well as other writers for *IRMI*, Pickthall equat-
 42 ed God's law with natural law, and stressed the need for rational thought and
 43 the pursuit of science to disclose it. This commonality is founded upon a
 44 Islamic modernist platform that was able to support differences such as
 45 Quilliam's adherence to Sultan 'Abdul Hamid, Pickthall's outspoken advocacy

of the Young Turks' Committee of Union of Progress, and the moving spirit in the Woking mosque and *IRMI*, Khwaja Kamaluddin, who belonged to the Ahmadiyya sect. Arguably, each of these orientations was reformist and was anyway subsumed in the non-sectarian form of Islam practised by 'Muslims involved in both the Woking Mission and the B[ritish] M[uslim] S[ociety] [who] were convinced that Islam would have to be presented in a modernist fashion to appeal to British people' (Ansari, 2004, p. 131).

As British Muslim writers and proselytisers, Quilliam and Pickthall could draw upon the experience of Indian Muslim modernists to develop the confidence to present a 'modernised' Islam to the indigenous British population, albeit those at an educated and professional level. The Indian Muslim experience demonstrated how the dominant early nineteenth-century colonial voices of Enlightenment rationalism and Christianity had provoked counter responses at the 'periphery'. Avril Powell points out the defeat of missionary evangelicals led by Karl Gottlieb Pfander at the hands of Muslim ulama in the April 1854 *muntazara* debate at Agra was made possible by a change of tactics by the latter. They 'counter-attack[ed] the basis of the Christian revelation in a manner which was, at that juncture, irrefutable by evangelical missionaries of Pfander's persuasion' (Powell, 1993, p. 3, pp. 228–29). She identifies the new methodology with arguments procured from 'recent publications in English of works of European Biblical Criticism'. This mode of argumentation was effective because evangelicals such as Pfander and his ally William Muir, the orientalist and Christian polemicist against Islam, were 'particularly resistant ... to Biblical Criticism'. Powell argues that 'Muir's provocative critique of Islamic religion and society' was itself partly responsible for 'stimulat[ing] what came to be called "Islamic modernism"' (Powell, 2003).

In what amounts to a postcolonial argument, Moaddel posits a three-pronged assault against Islam in India by evangelical missionaries, the 'Rationalist school' and 'the change in cultural policies of the East India Company'. On its own, James Mill's *History of India* 'provided the British an ideological justification to attack various functions of Islam. Its laws of crime were treated as barbarous, irrational, and void of a distinction between private and public law. The lack of separation of religious from civil laws, and the treatment of women were also judged harshly' (Moaddel, 2001, p. 681).

The glaring contrast between European civilization and the Islamic nations naturally gave rise to a pervasive consciousness of decadence among the modernists, which necessitated an account of the Muslim decline. There was also the need to defend and rehabilitate early Islamic history against the assaults of its critics.

(p. 686)

The Indian Muslim modernist response was radical. Sayyid Ahmad Khan – though often seen as sycophantic towards the British – took as his 'point of departure ... how Islam could be interpreted to accommodate rationalist

1 thinking and the findings of modern science' (p. 684). Chiragh Ali 're-examined
 2 the Quranic injunction on polygamy and concluded that the institution was
 3 practically illegal in Islam' (p. 685), while Sayyid Amir Ali 'presented his views
 4 on women slavery, religious intolerance and other issues raised in the evangeli-
 5 cal polemics, from an evolutionary perspective' (p. 688). Not only did Amir Ali
 6 demonstrate that other religions, particularly Christianity, had assisted in the
 7 immorality of past societies, oppression of women, and concubinage, he went
 8 on the offensive condemning its complicity in slavery. Turning to the Muslim
 9 traditionalists he also pronounced polygamy opposed to Islam's teachings as
 10 well as calling for a rejection of the traditional Muslim division of the world
 11 into abodes of war and righteous religion (p. 688).

12 If Islamic modernism, drawing on the European rationalism embedded in
 13 nineteenth-century Biblical criticism, was the victor in the debates between
 14 the colonial Victorian evangelical missionaries and Indian Muslims, this was
 15 not without its ramifications at home in Britain. The controversies over Bib-
 16 lical criticism, conflict between religion and science, humane ethics and reli-
 17 gious dogma, sectarianism, social division and poverty that rocked Christian
 18 belief in the Victorian period, clearly impacted on Quilliam. But he was also a
 19 beneficiary of the process whereby 'the spread of British political and mer-
 20 cantile influence and Christian religious and moral ideas' meant to be 'a pre-
 21 lude to the destruction of ancient, "heathen religions" turned out to be a
 22 major force for the deeper study and popularisation of those very religions in
 23 the west and their renaissance in their home territories' (Thomas, 1988,
 24 p. 282). The growing western interest in Islam in the nineteenth century can
 25 be seen from the authorities Quilliam calls upon in *The Faith of Islam*; in
 26 addition to quoting copiously from the Qur'an in English, he cites and quotes
 27 from well-known nineteenth-century western writers on Islam: Washington
 28 Irving, David Urquhart, Thomas Carlyle, and R Bosworth Smith, in addition to
 29 contemporary travellers and liberal clergymen, Dean Stanley and Canon Isaac
 30 Taylor.⁸ Additionally there is reference to Sayyid Amir Ali's *Life and Teachings*
 31 *of Muhammad*.

32 Pickthall's apologetic writings (many of which are drawn from sermons and
 33 lectures) indeed respond to a similar range of topics to those Moaddel lists as
 34 integral to the clash between Islamic orthodoxy and the discourse of the
 35 western colonisers: 'binaries like *human reason* versus *superstition*, *scientific*
 36 *rationality* versus *traditionalism*, *civilization* versus *savagery*, *gender equality*
 37 *versus male domination*, *freedom* versus *despotism*, *Christendom* versus *Hea-*
 38 *thendom*' (Moaddel, 2001, p. 678, original italics). In his influential Madras
 39 lectures of 1927, published the same year with the title *The Cultural Side of*
 40 *Islam*, Pickthall sets out Islam's teachings in the light of such concepts as
 41 science and education, superstition, reason, freedom of thought, religious
 42 tolerance and intolerance, gender, theocracy, the rise and decline of Islamic
 43 civilisation, Muslim brotherhood and fraternity (as opposed to the West's
 44 freedom and equality) as well as contemporary phenomena like nationalism,
 45 capitalism and socialism. (In an earlier article in *IRMI*, Pickthall used a long

quotation from Amir Ali to support his argument about religious tolerance and the Qur'anic verse 'no compulsion in religion' (Pickthall, 1917, pp. 377–78.) The overarching topos is western civilisation versus Islam (Pickthall, 1937). In these lectures it is clear that Pickthall's modernism cedes very little to western civilisation – unlike the modernisers in some Muslim societies, who were, he claimed, willing

to disregard the Shari'ah as something antiquated and to present Islam as a religion without law – a mere matter of personal belief, of abstract thought and of detached opinion ... to accept not only the scientific knowledge and achievements of the West ... but also the social and political ideals and institutions of the West'. Such a stance was 'suicidal madness.

(p. 164)

In two book reviews he wrote for the Hyderabad periodical *Islamic Culture* in 1931 and 1934, Pickthall's discerning and independent modernist position is further revealed in the views he expresses on reformers al-Afghani, 'Abduh, and Iqbal. Referring, one assumes, to Turkish students sent to Europe by Sultan Mehmet II since he also mentions Urquhart's ideas of the same time (see Nash, 2005, pp. 48–53), he claims Afghani's ideas were not 'as unprecedented' as westerners sometimes gave them credit for. 'Long before that visionary came to manhood European students and observers had formed similar ideas, declaring that Islam is capable of modern progress on Islamic lines, and advocating such progress for the Muslim peoples in preference to progress upon un-Islamic lines.' 'Abduh had 'stated that Muslims can find in the Qur'an all the guidance that they need at this crisis of their fate ... The object of the Egyptian movement is to revive the Muslim body from within' (Pickthall, 1934, pp. 151–52). These comments emphasise the merit and importance in Pickthall's mind of reform coming from within Islam rather than from the importation of ideas from the West. Indeed, like other Muslim modernists of the period, he saw European modernity as indebted to Islam for its progressive ideas. With regard to Iqbal, who in the early 1930s, if the review is to be believed, was still an object of suspicion for some Muslims, Pickthall accords him great praise for achieving precisely the former. His lectures (published in 1934 as *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*) had

done, perhaps, the greatest service that it is possible for any Muslim to render to Islam to-day. He has demonstrated to the Pandits of modern thought, in their own language and with a display of learning equal to their own, that Islam is really their religion though they know it not.

(Pickthall, 1931, p. 678)

Pickthall's remarks on these key proponents of modernist Islam demonstrate an evident sympathy that is, however, inflected by a re-statement of adherence



1 to a core Islam that signals his holding position as a western believer. The
2 assumption is not so much a defensive proposition, arguably the point of
3 departure of eastern Muslims like al-Afghani and 'Abduh, that Islam is cap-
4 able of adaptation to modern conditions once the necessary development in
5 Muslims' thought processes have been effected.⁹ Rather, in Pickthall's ideas,
6 neatly summed up in the piece 'Islam and Modernism' published in *IRMI* in
7 1918, modernism is represented as an episode in human history that requires
8 attuning to but which should not lead the believer astray. The distinction is
9 important: the adaptation must not be accomplished by altering the essen-
10 tials, which are understanding of *tawhid*, the performance of Islamic worship,
11 and obedience to Islamic law. As far as Islam was concerned, however
12

13 The only modernism [it] requires is an awakening to the new conditions
14 that prevail throughout the world, the new opportunities which lie before
15 it like a harvest waiting for the reaper. To bring us to the forefront of the
16 nations, to restore us in these modern times to the position of pre-
17 eminence which Muslims held of old, education, social and political
18 reform, is needed, but not the slightest alteration in belief or form of
19 worship. It would be a blessing to the world if Islam should once more
20 take the lead in human progress.

21 (Pickthall, 1918, p. 8)

22
23 At a point in time when – despite the slaughter on the western front –
24 European thought held to the idea of progress developed during the nine-
25 teenth century, converts like Quilliam and Pickthall exercised a dissident
26 position, questioning the axioms of western modernity that proposed a
27 western-led future for mankind. Christianity had already failed Europe and
28 would have no role in that future. The Christian churches had lost control.
29 Modernism could be seen as a western-originated distraction that had already
30 disoriented Christianity and was leading to ever-widening disorientation:
31

32 Europe claims to control the destinies of all the world, yet is itself with-
33 out control. For lack of what? For lack of a thinking head, for lack of a
34 religion which a modern man of reason can believe, for lack of a belief in
35 a Sovereign of the Universe to whose judgment we have all to bow.

36 (Pickthall, 1918, p. 5)

37
38 We might argue that British modernist Islam of the kind propounded by
39 Quilliam and Pickthall extended the terms of reference of the earlier Islamic
40 modernists. Operating on much the same platform as Indian modernists such
41 as Sayyid Amir and Khwaja Kamaluddin and the other contributors to
42 *IRMI*, the English converts had the confidence to pronounce on a mission for
43 modern Islam in which its role was not merely that of adapting Islam to the
44 modern world, but of urging the paramount agency of Islam as a cure for the
45 ills of that world. In this they might be said to look forward to the revivalists

who were already coming to prominence in Egypt and India, but for whom the sign ‘modern’ was to hold much more negative connotations, and for whom a form of Islam that promoted reason, freedom of thought and alignment with the progressive forces of the modern world would constitute a very suspect provenance indeed.¹⁰

Although it may emanate from quarters with specific interests, the recent revival of interest in Quilliam and Pickthall invites some important questions about Islam in Britain during the late colonial and postcolonial periods. Indian modernists such as Iqbal, at certain moments, mainly accepted the British empire ‘was a “civilizing factor” in the Islamic world’ (Kurzman, 2002, p. 7). The English Muslims were patriotically attached to the empire too, at least while they believed it was still possible for Britain and Turkey to be accommodated. As native converts they easily aligned themselves with a trend in Islam that was certainly inflected by colonial relationships with and within India, but which was nonetheless motivated by a paramount regard for Islam – as can be seen by the orientation both the British Indians and the Englishmen took in respect of Ottoman Turkey. At the same time, both the educated Indians and the Englishmen recognised that the modern period presented Islam with acute challenges in the realms of politics, cultural revival, freedom of religious interpretation, scientific investigation, women’s rights and so on.

[It] both required and permitted [the accident of the tension between Islamic faith and modern values] to be repaired: the threat of European domination made repair necessary, and the modern values associated with European domination made repair possible.

(Kurzman, 2002, p. 4)

Islam in post-Second World War Britain would inevitably be reformulated according to the influx of immigrants that arrived a decade and more after the emergence of postcolonial nations in the subcontinent. Already, on the eve of decolonisation, Wilfred Cantwell Smith saw the potential of Abu’l Ala Maududi, as the creator of a movement founded on reaction to modernity based upon emphasis of a negative interpretation of religious law promoted by fear. ‘Naturally, holding such views in religion, he lacks any socially progressive concepts’ (Smith, 1946, p. 151).¹¹ In Britain, the mass migrants would hardly qualify for the reception of gentlemen enjoyed by their elite predecessors, and the likes of Lord Headley were no longer to be seen. Neither were the new immigrants’ different versions of Islam cognate with that of the deceased English converts. The moment of British Muslim modernist had passed, but its legacy continues to inspire.¹²

Notes

- 1 [Muslim] Liberals reached the apogee of their power in the first two decades of the twentieth century’ (Kurzman 1998, p. 10).

- 1 2 Pickthall wrote in 1917: 'The Muslim's country is not Turkey, Egypt, India or
2 Bokhara; it is El Islamiyeh – the whole fraternity of Muslims' (Pickthall, 1920
3 p. 63). For a broader survey of the divided loyalties that troubled British converts
4 to Islam during the period in question see Gilham, chap. 6.
- 5 3 According to Smith, in their writings both Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Amir Ali also
6 'had a Western audience in view. Sir Sayyid's object was to prove to that audience
7 that Islām is a respectable religion and should not be disdained or attacked. Amīr
8 'Ali's is more ambitious, more confident: he hopes to attract western seekers to
9 Islam' (Smith, 1946, p. 49). It should be added that a major factor behind the
10 modernist message that emerged from Woking in particular was the Ahmadiyya
11 brand of Islam favoured by Kamaluddin. See Gilham, chap. 4.
- 12 4 Fazlur Rahman, (1979, pp. 212–15) however, challenged the view that historically
13 the Islamic world had been unable to respond to intellectual and cultural crises out
14 of its own resources.
- 15 5 Geaves adds, however, that Quilliam would have entertained neither 'Abduh's Arab
16 nationalism nor Ahmad Khan's dismissal of the Turkish Caliphate.
- 17 6 In addition to being the founder and highly visible leader of the Muslim commu-
18 nity, Quilliam was a former Unitarian and member of the Ancient Order of the
19 Zuzeimites (Geaves, 2010, p. 119). He displayed his social concern by keeping an
20 orphanage attached to the Liverpool Muslim Institute. On the issues of ethical and
21 moral objections to the Bible and religious dogma see J L Altholz (1988).
- 22 7 Quilliam contributed to the *IRMI* under the name of Henri de Leon.
- 23 8 On R Boswell Smith, Canon Taylor and Islam, see Bennett (1992).
- 24 9 In *Modern Islam in India* the young Cantwell Smith argued that the progressive
25 stance of Indian Muslim liberals and modernists was superficial and easily
26 reversed. Smith's hostility to Muslim modernists was repeated by Gibb who
27 accused Amir Ali of using 'casuistical and rhetorical devices' in his arguments
28 about women's status in Islam, and spoke of the 'intellectual confusion of moder-
29 nists' who were a 'self-constituted minority' (Gibb, 1947, p. 100). Gibb argued that
30 all modernist trends were overshadowed by the 'struggle against the pervasive
31 influences of European culture and material civilization' (Gibb, 1947, p. 32). Simi-
32 larly Basam Tibi opines: 'All versions of modern Islam are understandable only in
33 the context of their confrontation with Western European culture as the masters
34 and purveyors of the modern technological-scientific age' (Tibi, 1988, p. 6).
- 35 10 The Society of the Muslim Brothers founded in 1928 promoted Islam 'as a total
36 system, complete unto itself, and the final arbiter of life in all its categories ...
37 applicable to all times and to all places ... includ[ing] in its teachings the best fea-
38 tures [of all foreign ideologies] ... all the virtues of other systems' (Mitchell, 1969,
39 p. 14, p. 233). Revivalists like Sayyid Qutb would make broadly the same claim as
40 Pickthall as regards Islam's finality and the truth it offered for the modern world. See
41 especially Qutb's ideas in the opening chapter of *Social Justice in Islam* (c.2000).
- 42 11 Smith's negative assessment of the depth and scope of Islamic modernism in India
43 may have been ideologically based but it accords with later Muslim historians who
44 analysed its withering in India and elsewhere in terms of its being tar-brushed by
45 its connection with westernisation, as well as being subsumed by the general return
to conservatism among the revivalists. See Ahmad (1967) and Rahman (1979,
chaps 13 and 14).
- 12 The Abdullah Quilliam Society was founded in 1998 with the aim of restoring the
mosque, museum and other facilities established by Quilliam on their original
Liverpool site; the Quilliam Foundation seeks to counter the influence of extremist
Islamism and present a western Islam viable in Britain and Europe. Pickthall's
name remains alive through his English version of the Qur'an that continues to be
widely used. A BBC television programme reviewing the lives and faith of Quilliam
and Pickthall entitled 'Great British Islam' was broadcast on 18 July 2012.

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